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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine whether Palestinian children living in the West Bank experienced anxiety as a result of the Israeli occupation. It also attempted to assess whether their anxiety influenced their political views. Children ages 9-12, living in villages and refugee camps, participated in the study. Observations and interviews were made of the children's writings; games; drawings; behaviors; and songs. A significant difference was found in the levels of anxiety between village and refugee camp children. Some children reported less anxiety than before the Intifada and had made adaptations to their environment. Others had transcended the traumas of the Intifada and had identified morally, physically, and emotionally with the political causes. Some children who participated in events developed affirmative and positive reactions to stress. The study found that these children had developed a psychic immunity that made it possible for them to continue normal daily life. Their parents and family members supported and encouraged them. Youth without this support could not resist anxiety because their family members showed no fear. Because of their subjection to physical and verbal violence, Palestinian children were found to be more active and extreme in their political views. School work was found to be the only problematic issue in their lives. (JDM)

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Anxiety and Its Influence of the Political Views of Palestinian Youngsters

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Anxiety and its influence of the political views of Palestinian youngsters

Abstract

This paper instigated anxiety among the Palestinian children in the West Bank, as a result of the Israeli occupation ruthless and repessive policy. In comparison with studies that have shown that a very small percentage of people develop fear or psychic disturbances as a result of passive or active participation in violent events, it was found in this study that Palestinian children have developed in themselves a certain psychic immunity that made it possible for them to continue normal daily life a healthy regularity. They functioned better psychologically than before in terms of social achievement and confidence. Their school study was the only problematic issue in their life.

Problem of study:

Palestinian children have only known the violence of the Israeli occupation since 1967. This violence has been both physical and verbal and has taken different forms: trial, shooting, home raids and torture. All this has caused anxiety among children. But there were levels of anxiety depending on the environment of the Palestinian child: those living in refugee camps, villages, cities. The camprefugee children have developed higher degrees of anxiety. Their anxiety has increased since the beginning of the intifada taking into consideration that Palestinian children have their own domestic anxiety and experiences that magnified fear or pain in civilian life: a dog bite for example. Both sources of anxiety left their toll on the life of Palestinian child politically, socially, psychologically and educationally. In other words, their political views or attitudes were colored by their experiences with the Israeli soldiers.

This study attempted to address and find answers to the following questions:

1. Has the intifada, a war in itself, influenced the Palestinian children greater than before the intifada in terms of anxiety?
2. Has their anxiety influenced their political views?

Review of literature:

In Gaza, the Mental Health program conducted several studies about psychological health of Palestinians, the impact of current events and violence to which they were subjected.

One study dwelt on violence and its effect on the Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip. The study was done on the sample of 2,779

children between the ages of 7-15. The purpose of the study was to identify the kind of violent stimuli and confrontations to which the children have been exposed to and which influenced their mental and psychological health. It was found that some 45% of the subjects of the study had been subjected to beatings. Some 5% of children had their bones broken. Some 85% of children's homes were raided in the night by Israeli soldiers. These raids resulted in the arrests of 15% of children's fathers; 32% of child's siblings-brother. About 21% got injured. The researchers also found a higher degree of anxiety in general among children. This has been translated into fear of darkness, disturbing dreams (nightmares); fear of soldiers, fear of loneliness, feeling of tension and nervousness, loss and weakness in concentrations, bed wetting, spread of physical ailments that had no medical explanation. The children also witnessed so many cases of violence which have been distinctive to their psychological life. Children who had witnessed a family member being subjected to violence had a higher degree of anxiety and a lower appreciation of self than the children who had been subjected personally to violence. Children, subjected to violence, had activism and positive behavior compared with those who had witnessed violence against a family member.

In a study day about education in early childhood, psychologist Nabilah Spaniole revealed a clear discrimination between Arab and Jewish children in allocation of funds and their distribution.

According to Spaniole, some 50% of Arab children aged 5 could get involved in an educational facility compared to 98% in the Jewish sector. Only 25% of three-year-old Arab children could get a form of education. It was also found that 73% of coeducational programs were held in wealthy areas as opposed to 10% in the poor areas.

One the other hand, it was found that more 23% of Israeli families lived below the poverty line. In the Arab sector, some 67% of Arab children lived below the poverty line. Some 59% of them were considered poor even after receiving their national security insurance as opposed on only 10% among Jewish children. It was also revealed that some 10,000 in the Arab sector, between the ages of 6-13, dropped out of school. The rate of school leaving in the Arab adults amounted to 5 per one thousand while in the Jewish sector the average was 3.3.[1]

This study was based on interviews with Palestinian children 9-12 living in villages and refugee camps. Another primary source was my observation and experiences for a considerable period of time. The children belonged to lower socioeconomic class and middle social class. Interviews were collected from the subjects' writings, games, drawings, songs, and behavior.

Hypothesis of study

The hypothesis is that the subjects of the study would show a higher degree of anxiety, especially in the camps, in comparison with their anxiety before the intifada. And that this would harden their political views.

Results:

It was found that there were significant differences in degree of anxiety between villages and refugee camp children. Some children had greater anxiety before the intfada. After the intifada, they had less anxiety

[1]- "Obvious Discrimination between Arab and Jewish children in Israel" Al- Quds May 15, 1993: 4.

due to their positive environment and adaptation (Es-Sarraj, 1990). Some of them are now in a better state of mind. They have been buffeted by the intifada and its effects and have grown up stronger, whole and life-affirming, while others have been deeply and lastingly scared. Some have been able to transcend traumas of the intifada and the conflict. They began identifying themselves their political cause morally, physically and emotionally. Their preoccupation is the intifada expressing their fears but also hopes.

The anxiety has highly politicized the children in terms of their participation in the events. Palestinian children have witnessed the beating, arresting, killing of their parents, siblings and neighbors. They were terrified by the night raids of the soldiers. These personal experiences have left long lasting effects on the children. However, other children who actively involved in events, have developed affirmative and positive reaction to stress although they have hidden anxiety. Their involvement and active participation made a major contribution to their adjustment. Parents who showed phobias in front of soldiers, in presence if their children, left negative impact on them. These parents were also found that they never allowed their children to take a role in confrontations soldiers. Therefore, these children were victims of their parents' failure to let them grow up independently. Their children were "Victims" of their fears and anxiety.

The anxiety among Palestinian children and its increase is attributed to "the feelings of frustration and helplessness" (Quta and El-Sarraj, 1992). The feeling of anxiety was expressed in terms of release of tensions outwardly by burning a tire, throwing a stone, or writing on the

walls. In short, anxiety stemmed from the children's environment – home – and from outside the occupation.

The level of anxiety among male and female children in Gaza was 22% and 37% respectively (El- Sarraj). The females were found to be suffering from a high to severe anxiety. The parents' anxiety was obviously transmitted to their children. There was a higher incidence of behavioral problems (A. Baker, 1988).

Because of respected subjection to Israeli physical and verbal violence, the Palestinian children were forced to be more active and more extreme in their political views. This Israeli policy helped the Palestinian children become politically conscious of the conflict.

Palestinian youths, for more that 30 years, have been brought up on daily images of soldiers, chasing and beating them or firing at them or shooting tear gas canisters, let alone arresting them. For more than three decades, young Palestinians have been locked in a life – and –death struggle with the occupying army that has denied them an essential part of a normal, carefree childhood. The daily practices of Israeli soldiers have made Palestinian youth's anxiety, resulted from soldiers from the occupation, and its influence on forming their political stance through various ways of expression: writing, painting, games, songs, dress and their daily confrontation with heavily armed soldiers.

Paintings

As a result of the violent reality and hostile environment, Palestinians youths have expressed their anxiety by drawing their visions. In their drawing, in their drawings, Palestinian youths conveyed their

political views about what was happening around them. Every drawing was a political statement directed towards their environment. To move from general to specific, in June 1991, an exhibition of the children's artwork was held at a Palestinian exhibition center in Ramallah. The intifada was found to be theme of some 90% of the 450 paintings exhibited in a camp south of Ramallah. The Palestinian flag was portrayed in most paintings held aloft by tiny hands, waving from a tree, rooftops and electricity pylons. Life of Palestinians in refugee was another theme. One Palestinian youth drew the blocked entrance of the refugee camp made by the occupation soldiers, soldiers' jeeps being chased by stone throwers and flags of victory raised on electricity pylons. Another Palestinian youth painted a military bulldozer, a Palestinian martyr, a flag and demonstration.

The Palestinian youths from refugee camps were very much preoccupied with political drawings because the camps have felt the brunt of the suppression, violence and frustration. The Palestinian youths' drawing of the Palestinian flag on every work can be explained in terms of achieved and unachieved desires. The Palestinian child draws a flag of his homeland because it is an unachieved desire, and he wants to make it a reality.

Another exhibition of paintings by Palestinian youths was also held in September 1990. Of some 150 pictures, more than 30 had taken politics as their theme. Many others showed that politics was not far away from the consciousness of 12-year- old. The exhibition, like the first, included works by some 60 children aged 7-17. In addition to politics, the paintings dealt with animal life, fairy tales, life and abstract patterns.

A careful study of the paintings revealed and showed that girls tended to be less political. Boys began to show political interest at the age of 12. Of the political paintings, two were directly related to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein who dominated the political debate among the Palestinians in particular. One was a portrait of Saddam Hussein against a background of a Palestinian flag; the other showed Iraqi planes strafing a Star of David, a more sophisticated political statement. Other pictures showed Palestinians customary symbols of imprisonment, chains, bars and bleeding doves. Political symbols intruded elsewhere in some paintings. These showed the political maturity of these youths. The theme of little Red Riding Hood was a popular one. One girl drew the scene of Red Riding Hood and the wolf in the forest and a large dove flying overhead. Another boy drew the Red Riding Hood screaming while a hunter takes aim at the wolf with the submchine gun. The political implications become more compelling when the same hunter drawn, in the same colors. The same gun shows up in another picture, by the boy, firing at a group of Arab demonstrators. There were other less violent and more compelling political pictures: sensitive portraits of pained Palestinian faces. To conclude, when the children were asked why they had drawn political subjects, they responded, "This is the situation we live in".

Games:

Another outward sign of anxiety that influenced the Palestinian youths' political views was the games played by children on the streets and playgrounds, alleys of the Palestinian villages, cities and refugee camps. Youths would gather in schoolyards or streets. Since the early days of the intifada, the most popular games have been the "soldiers with

their pretend rifles" and the "heroes" with their stones. The groups would clash pulling apart and leaving "dead" and "wounded" on the groups. Cries and guttural sounds imitate the crack of the rifles shots and the boom tear gas bombs. This game, the most popular outward sign of the effects of the confrontation soldiers' and their violence, was played with variation.

Palestinian youths also acted plays which showed their anxiety, frustration and hopelessness about what the occupation is doing to them. One play dwelt on a Palestinian girl crossing the Allenby Bridge from Jordan to the West Bank. An Israeli soldier gives the girl a candy but then he breaks open her doll to see if she is carrying anything "dangerous". The girl acts by throwing the candy back at the soldier.

Confrontations

Palestinian youths expressed their political views which started to harden by making daily confrontations with the heavily armed soldiers. These included daubing Palestinian flags, raising them, barricading roads, hurling stones, petrol bombs and hand grenade attacks and damaging property. These were clearly a sign of the radicalization of their political views as a result of two much suppression. The Palestinian youth has become the symbol of the revolution of the stone. Their confrontations with soldiers have left many of them long- lasting effects and scars on them in terms of physical and mental problems.

When the 16-year- old Farid was asked why the stoned the Israeli soldiers, he had this to say: "Sooner or later, you will die, so there is nothing to be afraid of. They took our land; they killed our brothers; they

arrested my friends, our life is not so good that we can regret losing it." This view represents that of most Palestinian youths as they see themselves in the same boat and the main target of the soldiers. Another outward manifestation of physical resistance is the Palestinian youths' flashing of a V-sign at soldiers or at helicopters as a kind of challenge. In this regard, many a time Israeli soldiers have chased Palestinian youths for flashing V-sign. Imad khatib, 13, was a case in point. He was chased by an Israeli patrol. His crime was making a V-sign at them. They caught him, who weighed 32kg, beat him repeatedly, raised him high in the air, threw him to the ground and kicked him with their boots. Witnesses there said that three of the soldiers took souvenir pictures of this event- even passing the camera around so that everyone could be in the shot. Another practice was seen when Israeli soldiers used to tie the Palestinian youths to the metal rod of their jeeps' fronts so that soldiers could go through the city or camp or town freely, one could imagine the anxiety and its influence on these youths' political views.

Palestinian youths also flew balloons in the colors of the Palestinian flag forcing the soldiers to fire hundreds of bullets to blow off these balloons. Kites were also made and flown over city, camps to compensate for the lack of real copters to protect them. To convey a political statement, Palestinian youths used to wear T-shirt which expressed their sentiments, anger and frustration, hopes and aspirations. The T-shirts would carry black and white kaffiyeh. Others showed a Palestinian Kaffiyeh surrounded by barbed wire. But those spotted wearing T-shirts political or nationalistic connections were subjected to severe punishment.

The Palestinian youths also registered their political views by writing on the wall. As soon as darkness fell, these youths would emerge to scr: wl the latest slogans as directed by their leadership. Slogans would express the ideologies of factions in the occupied territories. When soldiers stormed neighborhoods, towns, villages and refugee camps, they used to stand over men, and women, youths at gunpoint forcing them to hold their identity cards aloft as painted out all traces of the political slogans.

Moreover, through the medium of national songs, youths expressed their political views. At wedding parties, at school, on the streets, youths would sing songs like "slings and catapults the flames of revolution will blaze." Some of the popular national songs were taped and became a big business. Youths would play those songs on tape recorders.

Any attempt to soften the political views of Palestinian youths requires an end to their anxiety caused by the occupation. The youth peace camp held in Spain in August 1992 failed to extricate the Palestinian youths of their anxiety. There was tension between Israeli and Palestinian youths attending the peace camps. During a cultural evening, even before the day the political discussions were to begin, the Palestinians performed a play in which every Palestinian girl told her mother how she had been beaten by an Israeli soldiers.

Considerable percentage of Palestinian youths developed fear or psychic disturbances as a result of passive or active participation in the events of the intifada. The influence of the occupation violence on the Palestinian youth was somewhat smaller than experiences that manifest fear or pain, physical or mental, in civilian life- a dog bite for example.

Some Palestinian youths developed in themselves a certain psychic immunity that made it possible to continue normal daily life a healthy regularity. In fact, they functioned better psychologically than before in terms of their study and social achievement and interaction. When this aspect was investigated, it was found that those youths received support and encouragement from parents and other family members. Parents and elder siblings never showed fear in front of them especially when soldiers broke into their homes. Other youths could not resist anxiety because their family members showed fear in front of the soldiers. This left long-lasting scars on their personality and behavior.

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City Mean	Village Mean	Camp Mean	Field Mean	Field
2.94	3.04	3.39	3.12*	Teaching
1.79	1.91	2.22	1.95	Psychology
1.53	1.69	1.89	1.70	Body
1.74	1.95	2.31	2.01	Behavior
3.56	3.55	3.82	3.64	Family
2.28	2.49	3.83	2.53	Terrified
2.84	295	3.53	3.12*	Future
2.39	2.69	3.29	2.79	Children Games

*Analysis of Variance

*One Way Anova